

Notes for *Life*

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“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

1 Cor. 15:58 (ESV)

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“Become merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36 ESV).

Dear Friends of Mercy and Life:

As Maggie Karner, director of LCMS Life and Health Ministries, is on medical leave, I am working with staff and the life committee to help fill in some gaps until she returns. I have come to a deeper appreciation for Maggie and her staff and the life committee during this time. They are passionate, working machines that crank out a lot of helpful, engaging resources to educate LCMS ordained and commissioned ministers, as well as our broader communities, about many life issues. They do a wonderful job of equipping others to carry forth the biblical message regarding God’s gift of life.

As I reflected upon these words of Jesus as part of His Sermon on the Mount, I recalled a comment made by the sainted Professor Kurt Marquardt more than 30 years ago. He was my faculty adviser as well as my primary professor of systematic theology. During one class discussion regarding a congregation’s participation in organized community life marches, a student asked Marquardt if the church should even be involved in these expressions of public protest of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe vs. Wade* and subsequent government funding for services that undermine the sanctity of life. Marquardt began his response to the question in his trademark style: “Ah, that is an excellent question and one that deserves our attention because one day you will be serving a congregation and answering similar questions.”

Marquardt began to quote various sections of Scripture and *The Book of Concord* to highlight how Lutheran engagement in life issues is at its best when it flows from Law and Gospel, not just the Law as it is most often displayed through signs and placards that bring only words of condemnation, guilt and shame. We are not prepared to speak for matters of life, he noted, if we do not first see ourselves as sinners in need of God’s mercy for the sins that we commit against the sacredness of human life that God created in His image. Having received full pardon through the Gospel, we bring God’s Gospel of mercy in Jesus Christ to fellow sinners with humility and compassion.

LCMS Life Ministry is one of our Synod’s ministries of mercy. It is grounded in the Word of Life who came into our world of death to give life through a word of Absolution, simple washing of water that is connected to the life-giving name of the Triune God, through His body and blood in His Holy Supper. It educates and advocates for life. It celebrates life from cradle to grave. It invites people who suffer from the effects of abortion to turn and receive life from the God of life.



Marriage Matters

REV. CHRISTOPHER S. ESGET,
PASTOR, IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL-LUTHERAN CHURCH, ALEXANDRIA, VA.

Controversies about marriage laws are not new to our generation. When our Lord Jesus was asked about the then-contemporary controversy over “any-cause divorce,” He grounded His argument in creation. “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:4-6 ESV). When pressed about the long-standing tradition of divorce, Jesus replies simply, “From the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8 ESV).

For Jesus, marriage is not defined by a legislature, a referendum, a court or constitution. Marriage is defined by God and not even Moses could override that. Repeatedly Jesus points us back to what was true “from the beginning.” Intrinsic to the created order is natural marriage — the lifelong, faithful union of one man and one woman.

We Christians see this established in Holy Scripture. However, one need not be a Christian to affirm this. We find common cause with all rational people in upholding natural law, defined thus: “Certain principles of law are inherent in the very nature of things, and that they can be discerned by rational creatures in the light of reason” (“Law,” *New Dictionary of Theology*, Intervarsity Press, Page 377).

The Declaration of Independence appeals to natural law when it says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that

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Many of you have been keeping Maggie in your prayers and asking for updates. Maggie reports that she completed round one of treatments and will soon begin round two. The treatments are working and she has some increased energy (It is hard to keep her down!). She appreciates the many expressions of love and concern for her and her family. Please do continue to keep the Karners in your prayers.

Peace be with you in Jesus, the Word of life,
Rev. John A. Fale, Board Certified Chaplain, American
Association of Pastoral Counselors Fellow
Associate Executive Director
Mercy Operations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO/THINKSTOCK

all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The purpose of government, it continues, is “to secure these rights.”

Becoming popular is the idea that government gives rights (as opposed to securing them). This is extremely dangerous, for what the government gives, it can take away. Yet many Christians, seeing that the culture is rapidly embracing a view of marriage that goes against both the teaching of God’s Word and natural law, are ready to retreat into their churches. The thinking is that we can have “Christian” marriage and let the state define marriage however it will — or do away with civil marriage altogether.

This is the wrong position for the church to take. From a civil perspective, this will make marriage matters worse. If the state gets out of the marriage business or erodes marriage to the point of meaninglessness, then the state will have to take on all manner of roles for which it is ill-equipped: “parent and discipliner to the orphaned, provider to the neglected, and arbiter of disputes over custody, paternity, and visitations. As the family weakens, our welfare and correctional bureaucracies grow” (What Is Marriage?: Man and Woman: A Defense, Girgis, Anderson, George, Page 9). In other words, as a culture of natural marriage erodes, the state replaces the family.

In an essay on the consequences of abolishing marriage, Stella Morabito writes, “Abolishing marriage strips the family of its autonomy by placing it much more directly under the regulating control of the state” (thefederalist.com/2014/04/09/bait-and-switch-how-same-sex-marriage-ends-marriage-and-family-autonomy). The notion that if the state “gets out of the marriage business” we will be freer to practice our faith is false. The reverse will be true, as the church retreats further within its walls.

Some leaders in the gay marriage movement acknowledge that their plan is to move from gay marriage to no marriage. Gay activist Masha Gessen said at the Sydney Writers Festival,

“Fighting for gay marriage generally involves lying about what we’re going to do with marriage when we get there.” [Applause.] “It’s a no-brainer that the institution of marriage should not exist” (*thefederalist.com/2014/04/09/bait-and-switch-how-same-sex-marriage-ends-marriage-and-family-autonomy*).

As Missouri Synod Lutherans, our goal is not to create a theocracy or force the government to accept all of our theological tenets. We do want to advocate for the government upholding and securing our right to religious freedom and to uphold natural marriage.

However, while our goal is not political, we do wish — indeed, are compelled — to witness to the world the love of Christ and the meaning of human life. Therefore, I suggest the following are suitable actions for our churches:

1. **Repent.** Every one of us has failed to “lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do,” with husbands and wives loving and honoring each other (Sixth Commandment, Small Catechism). Long before gay marriage was part of our national discussion, natural marriage did not always reflect God’s will of love and submission (Eph. 5). Divorce became common, love in marriage grew cold and children were not always seen as a blessing. Changing the culture begins with changing our own culture of marriage and family, taking the marriage

union with the utmost seriousness and welcoming children in our churches.

2. **Receive.** Christ makes His bride the Church spotless. Your pastor is glad to pronounce forgiveness to you for whatever sins burden your conscience. Whether in the Divine Service or privately before your pastor, take heart that the words of Absolution are for you.

3. **Love.** Those who struggle with same-sex attraction need to hear the mercy of our Lord Jesus for sinners and not be treated as a separate, more extreme class of sinners. If we believe what we say in the confession of sins, we will not condemn others as being worse than ourselves. All stand in need of Christ’s mercy.

4. **Stand.** It will become increasingly unpopular to uphold natural marriage. From the pulpit, at the kitchen table and in the marketplace of ideas, we dare not compromise God’s design for marriage. Patiently, charitably, but with conviction, confess how natural marriage and family is a blessing to the world.

We are not the first to deal with challenges to God’s design for marriage. Our Lord Jesus guides us in the way we should go, the way it was intended to be “in the beginning.” He will be with us through the dark days that are descending upon our land.

Infertility Ethics Symposium

Infertility Ethics Symposium will inform conscientious choices, defend life

BY REBECCA MAYES

Registration remains open for the Infertility Ethics Symposium, sponsored by LCMS Life Ministry and the Concordia Seminary Life Team. The symposium is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 8, at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This one-day symposium is free of charge for pastors, commissioned ministers and church-work students. It serves as an opportunity to further their education on the rapidly changing — and somewhat intimidating — field of reproductive technology.

“The church needs to be prepared to help our people make good, God-pleasing decisions,” said the Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb, executive director of Lutherans For Life and a symposium presenter. “Couples are exposed to a variety of reproductive technologies. [Professional church workers] are the ones they will be turning to for advice on these issues.”

Currently, 1.5 million couples in the United States are experiencing infertility, which is defined as the inability to conceive after 12 months of intercourse without contraception

(www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/Infertility/index.htm). Many of these couples belong to our churches, our circles of friends and our own families. The choices they have for infertility treatments can be overwhelming and confusing. How is a Christian couple to know what choices are morally permissible? Can the Bible inform them on how to make these difficult decisions? The Infertility Ethics Symposium is a starting point for answering these questions.



“It’s important to attend the symposium because the culture is talking about infertility ethics, but the church has for too long been silent,” said the Rev. Christopher S. Esget, member of the Sanctity of Life Committee for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Life Ministry and a symposium presenter. “With the best of intentions, we end up saying insensitive and even spiritually damaging words. This symposium is a major step in helping our church find again her voice on an issue that is only growing in importance.”

What can attendees expect to learn at the symposium? Below is a list of the presenters and a summary of their presentations:



The Rev. Peter Brock, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church—Bingen in Decatur, Ind.: *The LCMS and Infertility Ethics*

Though the quickly changing landscape of technological advancements and bioethics may introduce unique questions and problems, the theological perspective through which we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are given to view the world, ourselves and our children remains as constant as it is comforting. By listening to Lutheran voices and bringing them into conversation with careful thinkers of other traditions, we will emphasize the biblical vision that orients and directs our thinking about infertility, offering suggestions for a helpful and hopeful way forward.



The Rev. William M. Cwirla, senior pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Hacienda Heights, Calif.: *Be Fruitful and Multiply: Fertility Ethics Viewed in the Light of Creation and Redemption*

For a theologically informed discussion of fertility, we must take into consideration the biblical doctrines of creation and redemption. Fertility begins with the creative Word: “Be fruitful and multiply,” which is the source of all fertility and extends into the work of redemption by way of the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). The incarnation of the promised Seed in the person of Jesus Christ redeems the old creation and ushers in the new. Living in the “last days” of the old creation, baptized believers today must take into account their eschatological context as they confront various ethical issues pertaining to fertility and infertility.



The Rev. Christopher S. Esget, pastor of Immanuel Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Alexandria, Va.: *Pastoral Care for Those Experiencing Infertility and Miscarriages*

Barrenness is inextricably linked to mankind’s fall into sin. Many suffer in silence, presenting unique challenges to the pastor. Esget will address barrenness and the curse of Gen. 3, the lives of the patriarchs and the unique challenges of

modern reproductive technology in the spiritual lives of our parishioners. Particular attention will be paid to prayer and preaching in spiritual care of the barren.



The Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb, executive director of Lutherans For Life: *IVF: From Created to Creator*

Where does the theologian begin when addressing the issue of in vitro fertilization (IVF)? We do not begin with biology but with theology, specifically the Second Article and the incarnation of our Lord at His conception. From this starting point we will be able to establish a foundation upon which to properly look at and analyze the biology involved in IVF and, subsequently, what this means for God’s people on a practical level.



The Rev. Kevin E. Voss, D.V.M., Ph.D., associate professor of philosophy and director of the Concordia Center for Bioethics at Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, Wis.: *An Ethics Survey of Reproductive Counseling Practices in the Lutheran Church*

A 112-item survey was mailed to 1,300 congregational clergy affiliated with the Conservative branch of Judaism, the Roman Catholic Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to determine their views about infertility and genetic counseling provided by clergy. This presentation focuses specifically on responses given by LCMS parish pastors about their reproductive counseling practices.



The Rev. Dr. Robert Weise, the Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis Chair in Pastoral Ministry and the Life Sciences and professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis: *Embryo Adoption: Helping or Hurting My Neighbor?*

One of the by-products of in vitro fertilization and direct-egg sperm injection is left-over embryonic human beings that will not be used either to be placed back into the mother or a surrogate. What about embryo adoption as the “logical” approach to see that these unclaimed, unwanted embryos receive adoptive parents? The processes arriving at this stage, the moral and theological implications for procreation, parenting, human experimentation and caring for the smallest and weakest of our neighbors will be discussed.

To register for the symposium, contact LCMS Life Ministry at 314-996-1711 or tracy.quaethem@lcms.org to receive more information.



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Want to stay on top of life news from LCMS Life Ministries? “Like” our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/LCMSLife. You’ll be notified when the latest *Notes for Life* issue is out, and we’ll link to important life news in the meantime. Tell your friends too! Click the “Suggest to Friends” link on the left-hand side of the page. Thanks for your support.

Calling All Readers

We want to hear from you! If you’ve got ideas for future issues, comments, feedback on articles you’ve read in *Notes for Life* or news and life outreach stories from your part of the world, please let us know. Write to lifeministries@speaking4life.com with your stories, and be sure to include your name, city and state. Or post on our Facebook wall.

Coming Up

The “Other” Life Issues. To many, the sanctity of human life equals taking a stand against abortion. In reality, embracing a culture of life includes much, much more. The next issue of *Notes for Life* will take a closer look at some of the issues currently facing pro-life advocates in today’s world. Not a subscriber? Don’t miss the next issue! **Subscribe now** to receive this free quarterly email newsletter.

CONFERENCE PREVIEW: LCMS LIFE CONFERENCE

It’s Your Time to Stand!

Every life matters. That’s why *It’s Your Time to Stand* at the LCMS Life Conference, Jan. 22-24, 2015.

Registration is now open for this event at the Hilton in Crystal City, Va., just across the river from Washington, D.C.

Participants will join a few hundred of their closest Lutheran friends at the National March for Life, accompanied by thousands of others in peacefully walking from the National Mall to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of the sanctity of human life. Won’t you stand with us?

The conference opens on Thursday, Jan. 22, with a pre-march Divine Service at the Hilton hosted by Immanuel Lutheran Church, Alexandria Va. Following the march, conference participants will enjoy a family-style dinner at the post-march warm up. The day ends with a service of Vespers.

Friday, Jan. 23, and Saturday, Jan. 24, will provide plenty of theological motivation and practical know-how to encourage you in advocating for life and to equip you in your vocation as Christian citizen to STAND for those who will never take their first steps. A pro-life banquet is included in the conference registration and will be held Friday evening.

To register or learn more, visit www.lcms.org/events/lifeconference. Space is limited, so reserve your spot now. Registration is \$185 for adults (\$200 after Nov. 30) and \$85 for students (\$100 after Nov. 30). Registration includes Metro tickets to the March for Life, conference attendance and all breakfasts and dinners. Lodging is \$119 per night at the Hilton. Registrants must make their own lodging arrangements by calling 703-481-6800 and mentioning the LCMS Life Conference.



CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

- LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
- Dr. Robert George, chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
- Lila Rose, founder of the pro-life group Live Action
- Carol Tobias, president, National Right to Life Committee
- Mollie Hemingway, journalist
- Donna Harrison, M.D., American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- Laura Davis, director, Youth4Life
- Rev. Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, professor, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
- Rev. Dr. Jim Lamb, executive director, Lutherans For Life
- Trish Kagerbaer, development director, A Place of Refuge Ministries

Contact Your Elected Officials

For the name of your U.S. representative or senator, contact your local elections office or call the Federal Citizen Information National Contact Center at 800-333-4636.

For the most recent information about elected national officials, log on to these websites or call the following Capitol switchboard numbers:

Senators

202-224-3121

www.senate.gov

Representatives

202-225-3121

www.house.gov

To contact the White House

Comments 202-456-1111

Switchboard 202-456-1414

Fax 202-456-2461

TTY/TDD phone numbers for hearing impaired only:

Comments 202-456-6213

Visitor's office 202-456-2121

President Barack Obama

president@whitehouse.gov

Vice President Joe Biden

vice.president@whitehouse.gov



PHOTO: LCMS COMMUNICATIONS/ERIK M. LUNSFORD

District Life Coordinators: Imagine the Possibilities

REV. JONATHAN LANGE, OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH, EVANSTON, WYO.

Imagine what we could accomplish together for the sanctity of life if each pastor didn't have to re-invent the wheel every time a new opportunity or a new obstacle presented itself. Imagine a single point of contact that was both in tune with your unique context and conversant with the ever-changing national scene in right-to-life issues. Imagine the energy and creativity that could be unleashed when church leaders from all over the country, passionate for life, come together to exchange insights and ideas. Imagine how much more productive Lutherans For Life could be if it could concentrate more resources on the development of new materials and less time promoting materials already developed. Imagine how much more responsive our LCMS Life Ministry could be if it received real time input and feedback from congregations across the Synod.

If you can imagine any one of these benefits, you will be delighted to hear that you are not alone. For years, Lutherans For Life has been talking with LCMS Life Ministry about how to make such a network a reality. Now, through the grass-roots encouragement of various districts and individuals, we are rapidly seeing this vision take shape through a network of district life coordinators.

The key is the listening ear. For nearly a half century, people, organizations and pastors have been working diligently throughout the Synod to preach the Gospel in the arena of pro-life activity. Each of these entities can easily see the benefits of cooperation and coordination. But each also has its own special emphases and interests. How can they be brought together into a closer cooperation without losing the unique and special contributions that each has to offer?

Thanks be to God! We have begun. And by God's blessing it is one of the more promising and exciting developments in our Synod's pro-life work.

More than a year ago, when I first picked up the phone to discuss this with Maggie Karner, I was overwhelmed by the quick and enthusiastic response. I called merely to ask if there was any way I could help. Within days, LCMS Life Ministry was collaborating with Dr. James I. Lamb of Lutherans For Life (LFL). By October, LFL and LCMS Life Ministry submitted a proposal to the district presidents.

Less than a year later, more than half of LCMS districts have appointed volunteer district life coordinators. These volunteers serve as a nexus of communication and resources for



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Your generous gift to the international and domestic work of LCMS Life Ministries will make a tremendous difference and help to uphold the message of Christ’s mercy to all in body and soul. [Click here](#) to give.

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the entire district. These coordinators make it their business to keep current on the spectrum of life issues and to familiarize themselves with the materials and educational opportunities offered by LFL and LCMS Life Ministry. They are ready to help congregations that are seeking to reach out into their communities with the Gospel of life. They are in a position to encourage and inform the district pastors about opportunities as they present themselves. Most of all, they are able to help district presidents create a conversation and keep it going about how life issues are integral to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

While we are halfway to our goal, there is still more that we can accomplish. Mutual listening and sensitivity has given birth to the project. Mutual listening and sensitivity is likewise the only way to complete it. What began as a grass-roots effort must continue to be so if we are not to lose our focus.

As more districts consider appointing their own district life coordinators, we are seeking to support and amplify their efforts. Let this be our motto: Organize cooperation, not co-opt organizations.

By God’s grace, we are learning to better listen to each other with each passing day. The communication, cooperation, coordination and collegiality that results can only enhance the service (diakonia) of all the life ministries in our midst. As we continue life together (koinonia) in humility and love, let us pray the Lord of life that He might create in our midst of model which stands as a witness (martyria) to scattered pro-life organizations throughout our land about the benefits of working together in humility and love.

To find out if your district has a life coordinator, contact tracy.quathem@lcms.org.

Resources

- **LCMS Life Ministry Life Library.** More than 200 articles on topics including two kingdoms, vocation and Christian ethics are at your fingertips via our new online “Life Library.” Many articles are lay-friendly, while theological papers offer more in-depth study. All are free and easily downloadable. Visit www.lcms.org/lifelibrary and particularly the “Procreation Issues” page for in-depth resources on procreation and birth control issues.
- ***Mercy at Life’s End: A Guide for Laity and Their Pastors*** by Rev. John T. Pless. Family members who must make end-of-life decisions for their loved ones are faced with many questions and struggles. *In Mercy at Life’s End: A Guide for Laity and Their Pastors*, the Rev. John T. Pless addresses those questions and provides comfort to those making difficult decisions. This booklet is available for \$2 from Concordia Publishing House at www.cph.org.
- ***Matters of the Heart: The 2014 Lutherans for Life National Conference*** will be held Oct. 24-25 in Grand Rapids, Mich. For more information or to register, visit www.lutheransforlife.org/conference.